

## Another gunfight

Can you imagine a gunfight between a rabbi and the president of a synagogue over which prayer book to use? Rabbi Moses May and Abraham Waldman of Beth Israel in Portland, Oregon, had such a confrontation. The congregation was founded in 1859 and had a series of religious leaders before May had arrived. Services were conducted in the Orthodox tradition, using the prayer book *Minbag Ashkenaz*. May wanted to use *Minbag America*, published by Isaac Mayer Wise, and members of the congregation were divided between using *Minbag Ashkenaz* and *Minbag Portland* created by the board of directors of the synagogue.

Waldman, the president-elect of the synagogue, did not want to see the prayer book changed. He and the rabbi had been arguing for years, and their dispute erupted in a fistfight and shoot-out on a Friday morning in October 1880, under the window of the Esmond Hotel, where President Rutherford B. Hayes was staying. Rabbi May had been talking to a friend outside the hotel when Waldman came up behind him. Waldman grabbed May by the collar and hit him in the eyes, breaking his glasses. The rabbi pulled out a pistol and shot at his attacker. His first shot missed, but his second shot tore through Waldman's coat. Another man grabbed the rabbi before he could reload and shoot again.

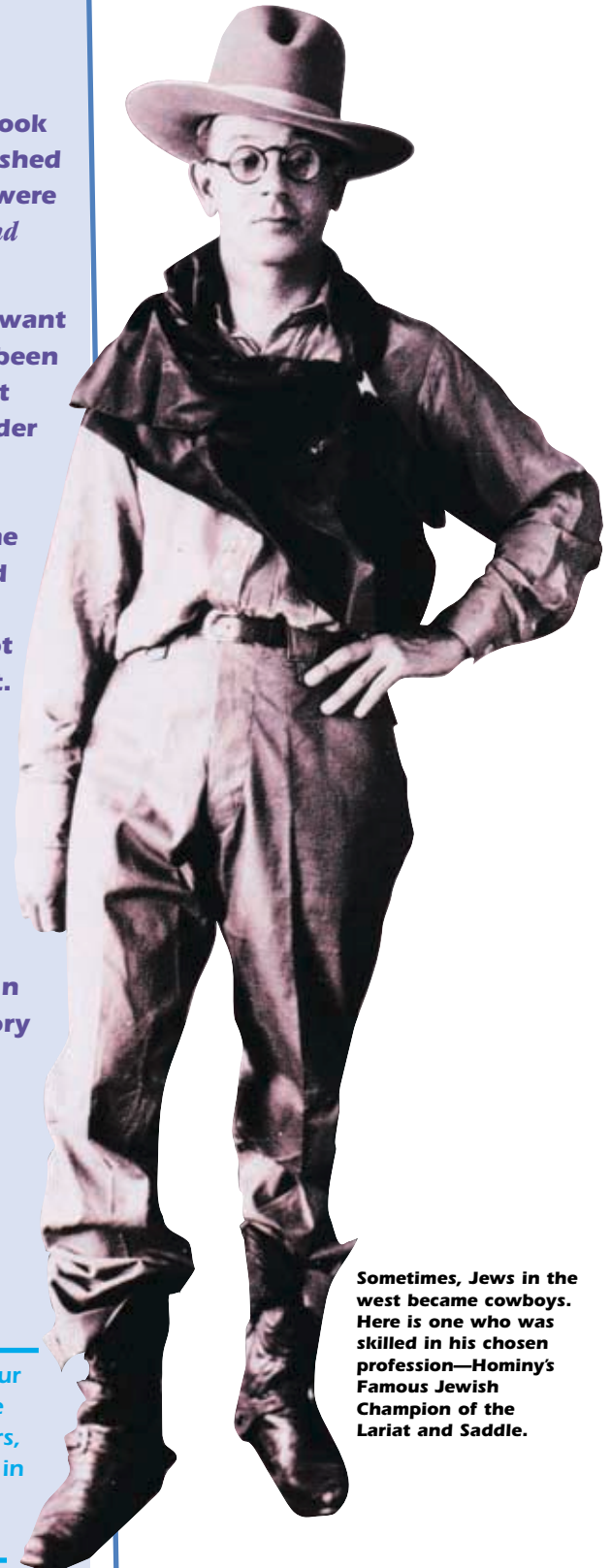
The fight was covered in several newspapers. The *Daily Standard* of Portland headlined the story: "Pastoral Relations: How Rabbi May and Brother Waldman Serve The Lord." It ended by noting that "Waldman . . . a well known and highly respected citizen . . . was arrested in the afternoon . . . and fined for assault, but, as far as can be learned, Rabbi May was not molested." When the story was heard back east, Rabbi Isaac M. Wise wrote, "Mr. Waldman was not hurt, but the rabbi was soundly thrashed for being such a poor marksman." Wise ended by writing, "It is a pity that Israel should have produced a shooting clergyman."

from I. Harold Sharfman, *The First Rabbi: Origins of Conflict Between Orthodox and Reform: Jewish Polemic Warfare in pre-Civil War America: A Biographical History*. (Malibu, Calif.: J. Simon/Pangloss Press, 1988)



How would you feel about changes being made to your synagogue's prayer books? Who should decide on the changes? Who decides which special readings (prayers, songs, and poems), may be included in a prayer book in the first place? Are there prayers that should never be changed in any Jewish prayer book?

LOOK AT IT



Sometimes, Jews in the west became cowboys. Here is one who was skilled in his chosen profession—Hominy's Famous Jewish Champion of the Lariat and Saddle.

